

MAR 21 2005

TO THE FORUM:

The following testimony was given in support of the Council resolution asking the Charter Commission to consider writing a new charter:

In discussing this resolution it is well to begin with the charter's own words. The charter says that at ten-year intervals a charter commission shall be appointed "to study and review the operation of the county government under this charter. (If) the commission deems changes are necessary or desirable, the commission may propose amendments to the existing charter or draft a new charter" to be submitted to the voters at any general or special election as may be determined by the commission.

Is this charter provision reasonable? I believe it is more than reasonable; it is one of the wisest provisions in the charter. Circumstances change, new issues emerge, and periodic review and reform are essential.

Neither the Council nor the Mayor nor the public can order the Charter Commission to write a new charter. The commission has the sole authority to determine if a new charter is needed. However, the charter requires that the commission base its decision on the available evidence.

I believe there is compelling evidence in favor of writing a new charter. I also respect the authority and integrity of the commission. In submitting testimony to them, I have taken the position that they should write a new charter or explain to the public why a new charter is not needed.

In my opinion, public awareness and public support are essential for the commission's successful completion of its task. As this resolution notes, in the past the commission twice proposed extensive revisions of the charter that the voters failed to approve. I believe the negative votes reflected lack of communication rather than strong opposition to the commission's proposals. One positive sign is The Garden Island's decision to do its part to fill the communication gap.

The Mayor and Council also have crucial roles to play in publicizing the work of the commission. This resolution is an important first step. Now the top priority should be arranging for Charter Commission meetings to be broadcast on Ho'ike on a regular basis.

Horace Stoessel

*submitted 3/17/05
The Garden Island*